

The Affect of Division-Level Consolidated Administration on Battalion Adjutant Sections

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Subject Area Manpower

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The Marine Corps committed to consolidating personnel administration above the traditional battalion/squadron-level of command seven years ago yet has not fully developed the automated systems to leverage the loss of over a thousand personnel administrators. Marine adjutants, therefore, have assumed responsibility for many labor-intensive personnel and manpower-related functions such as managing personnel reporting requirements, personnel assignments, and tracking personnel action requests. Consequently, their offices or "sections," particularly at the battalion-level, have inadequate information systems support, manpower, and training to operate effectively within the current construct of division-level, consolidated personnel administration (CONAD).

Traditional Organization

Prior to the consolidations, all administrative functions were performed by battalion administration centers (BAC). A typical BAC was comprised of two distinct sections, the adjutant section and the personnel section. Ten junior Marines, one staff sergeant, and a lieutenant were assigned to the adjutant section and were responsible for all general administrative functions such as preparing correspondence and managing publications, awards, and the command's performance evaluation program. Twenty personnel clerks, one staff sergeant, and a chief warrant officer were assigned to the personnel section and

were responsible for all manpower and personnel administration functions.

Background

The initiative to consolidate personnel administration above the traditional battalion-level stemmed from a 1997 study conducted by the Marine Corps' Force Structure Review Group (FSRG). Essentially, the FSRG recommended consolidating personnel administration further in order to decrease the number of Marines serving in the administration field and to increase the number of Marines serving in the combat arms occupational fields. The FSRG reasoned that computer technology could automate administrative processes and reduce the need for Marine administrators.¹ The Commandant of the Marine Corps approved the proposal and CONAD experiments began in the fall of 1997. Since then, all major Marine Corps commands have achieved varying levels of consolidation. The 1st Marine Division, for example, has consolidated at the regimental-level while the 2d Marine Division consolidated all of its personnel sections into a single CONAD center in 2000.

Information Systems Support

The concept of consolidating personnel administration above the battalion-level was dependent on the Marine Corps automating

¹ U.S. Marine Corps, *ALMAR 137/98: Consolidated Personnel Administration Experiments*. 2 April 1998.

labor-intensive personnel and manpower-related administrative processes. The importance of automation was recognized when the concept of consolidation was proposed in 1997 and reiterated during a 1998 Quality Management Board (QMB) meeting to review the initial results of consolidation experiments and to identify requirements for future consolidations. One of the QMB's key recommendations was that the Marine Corps needed to "develop [and field] an integrated total force automated personnel management system...before considering migrating to a single centralized level of support."² In light of the recommendation, the Marine Corps began programming and developing the total force administration system (TFAS).

When it is fully developed and fielded, the Marine Corps expects that TFAS and its web-based interface, Marine Online (MOL), will provide a "single sign-on, predominately self-service environment for Marine Corps pay and personnel administration."³ In essence, the system should shift the responsibility for managing pay and personnel admin matters from administrators to commanders and individual Marines.

² U.S. Marine Corps, *MARADMIN 138/98: Future of Personnel Administration*. 1 December 1998.

³ U.S. Marine Corps, *MARADMIN 371/04: Total Force Administration System (TFAS) and Marine Online (MOL) Fielding Update*. 1 September 2004.

Regrettably, TFAS has developed slowly. The initial version was fielded in 2001 and offered very limited capability. Furthermore, bundled improvements were still in the developmental stage as of January 2005. As a result, commanders and individual Marines do not have the ability to manage their pay and personnel matters directly. Instead, they rely on adjutant sections to manage or to coordinate personnel administration functions for which they are neither staffed nor trained to perform. Understandably, the lack of automation has created an inefficient system.

Interestingly, the former head of the TFAS Branch at Headquarters Marine Corps, Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey Peterson, suggests that the existing inefficient system was created intentionally. He states that "without those [personnel administration] cuts, the Marine Corps would most likely not have created the necessary sense of urgency to start moving toward a 21st century model for pay and administrative services."⁴ Clearly, Lieutenant Colonel Peterson argues that the Marine Corps designed the system for failure in order to demonstrate the need to dedicate resources for systems development.

⁴Jeffrey M. Peterson, "The Changing Face of Marine Corps Administration," *Marine Corps Gazette* 84, no. 7 (2000): 45.

Manpower

The challenges associated with the loss of personnel administrators and slow systems development have caused battalion adjutant sections to struggle unnecessarily with personnel and manpower-related administrative responsibilities. Most adjutants have also assumed responsibility for the personnel section's share of administrative-related collateral duties such as managing the government travel charge card program. Unfortunately, evidence that adjutants shoulder responsibility for these functions is reflected in both the Marine Corps Administrative Procedures Manual (MCAP) and the basic adjutant course curriculum, suggesting the shifting of those responsibilities to adjutants instead of Marines and commanders may be more permanent than expected and not just a temporary solution to the current situation. The MCAP was revised in 2004 to account for the consolidation of personnel administration above the battalion-level and now lists over fifteen manpower and personnel-related administrative functions under the responsibility of the adjutant section. Examples of these functions include managing the command's manpower resources, issuing command special orders, and preparing personnel statistical data for higher headquarters.⁵

⁵ U.S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Administrative Procedures*. Washington, D.C., 2004.

Accordingly, one-third of the classes taught to entry-level adjutants focus on manpower and personnel administration functions.⁶

As expected, structure that was originally designed to support traditional battalion adjutant section responsibilities has not changed despite the significant increase in responsibility. Therefore, adjutant sections are not properly manned to perform their current mission. Unsurprisingly, at least 63 percent of the battalion adjutants presently assigned to the 2d Marine Division believe that their sections are understaffed, according to a survey conducted in December 2004. Although the intent of the consolidation was to redistribute Marines from the administrative field to combat arms field, at least one noncommissioned officer and two personnel clerks should have remained at each command to perform the personnel and manpower functions that remained at the battalion-level due to lagging systems development.

Table 1

Do you feel that your section is adequately staffed to accomplish its mission?			
	Percent		
	No	Unanswered	Yes
Battalion Adjutants, 2d Marine Division	63	21	16

⁶ *MCCSSS Official Website*. <http://www.lejeune.usmc.mil/mccsss/pas_schoolhist.htm> (3 December 2004).

Training

Since the consolidations, the battalion adjutants have remained the sole administrative officer directly responsible to the commander for all administrative matters. Adjutants at the regimental/group-level and higher, however, share responsibility for administrative functions with other administrative officers. For example, most regimental headquarters in the 2d Marine Division retained a personnel officer even after the consolidations. At the division-level, the administrative responsibilities are still shared amongst the assistant chief of staff for personnel (G-1), the deputy assistant chief of staff for personnel, the division personnel officer, and the adjutant. Legal administration is also performed by the staff judge advocate, not the division adjutant or the G-1.

Since battalion adjutants and their administrative clerks are entry-level administrators and single-handedly manage a wide range of administrative functions, they arguably require the greatest depth of training. Regrettably, however, the current curriculums for the basic adjutant and administrative clerk courses fall noticeably short in covering the adjutant section functions outlined in the MCAP. The adjutant course curriculum does not provide instruction on managing the command's equal opportunity program, tables of organization, staffing requirements, or TFAS. It is understandable, therefore, that at

least 68 percent of the adjutants in the 2d Marine Division believe they were inadequately trained for their first assignment. Most surprisingly, the administrative clerk basic course does not provide instruction on personnel or manpower-related administration functions. Both courses need to be reviewed and changed, if adjutant sections are expected to perform those functions. Without additional training battalion adjutants and their Marines will continue to be unnecessarily challenged to compensate for the lack of systems support and manpower.

Table 2

Do you feel that the adjutant basic course adequately prepared you for your first assignment?			
	Percent		
	No	Unanswered	Yes
Battalion Adjutants, 2d Marine Division	68	21	11

Conclusion

The Marine Corps is moving forward with consolidations. Within the next few years, there will be one personnel administration center servicing each Marine Corps base. Administrators, particularly battalion adjutants, will undoubtedly continue to face challenges due to slow systems development. TFAS, when it is fully realized, will presumably support the consolidations. Ideally, TFAS will ultimately

relieve the adjutant sections of the personnel and manpower administration functions for which it is not staffed or trained. In the interim period, the Marine Corps should carefully consider revising entry-level courses for administrators and redistributing Marines assigned to the CONADs to compensate for the lack of systems support, manpower, and training that is plaguing the adjutant community.

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